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Emerging Leader Institute Final Paper

The summer prior to participating in the Emerging Leader Institute I attended a week long leadership workshop called Leadershape. This program truly changed my life, and opened up a whole new realm of human behavior that I wanted to experience; this behavior is that of leaders and followers. At Leadershape, I spent 6 long, extraordinary days without a T.V., or any contact to the outside world. At this workshop I was molded by my fellow “leaders,” I realized I was leaving as someone much different than the person who had begun the program six days earlier. Leadershape was such a fulfilling, life altering experience for me, and I wanted to experience something equally as thrilling all semester long; that is when I stumbled upon ELI. I found ELI to be the perfect opportunity to continue my journey through leadership and self realization; I also thought it would be an excellent way to get involved on campus and make excellent connections! My prediction was correct, through ELI I have made many connections, met people I would have never met, and experienced personal fulfillments that would have been otherwise overlooked. ELI allowed me to experience people and ideas that changed me and my leadership style.

Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “You do not lead by hitting people over the head- that’s assault, not leadership.” On any given day, a walk around the University of Kentucky’s campus will lead to several assaults; I don’t mean literal ones, but the type that Eisenhower was speaking of. So-called leaders, especially one’s at UK are constantly beating people over the head with the idea that they need to get involved, or

that they need to go to an event; when in reality, UK students only get fed up with all of the things they are recruited to do. Before ELI, I was the type of leader who everyone avoids when they walk into the room. At the beginning of the class we took several self assessments; and in each assessment I scored high in dominant leadership styles and methods. The assessments described me as a controlling, emotionless and self involved leader. These results were very surprising to me. I had always viewed myself as a compassionate and caring person; and had assumed my personal traits carried over into leadership roles. It was disheartening to find out my characteristics as a leader and a person were very different.

There were several aspects of my personality that I wanted to challenge myself on as the semester progressed. I have always known that I speak up with out thinking during class, and that I typically always have something to say on any topic. At the beginning of the semester I challenged myself to become a more compassionate leader, a better listener, and a more meaningful speaker. I believe that ELI has given me a great opportunity to learn about myself through the speakers and my classmates. Each speaker brought a different and equally interesting opportunity to grow as a leader; whether the task is speaking up in class, letting others talk, or getting involved in a class activity. Through the speakers, I was able to adapt to different settings and moods they brought to our classroom. Through material covered in the class, my mentor group, and personal relationships I have been able to grow as a person and a leader. At the beginning of the class I was a leader that I would not even want to follow, and have matured into a leader who is balanced, passionate, and someone who attracts followers instead of assaulting them!

During the first half of the semester a guest speaker, Rhonda Strouse asked our class to take a personal profile assessment called DiSC. The DiSC classifies us as a Dominant leader, an Influential Leader, a Steadiness leader, or a Cautious leader. I was classified as a Dominant leader; along with detailing my key characteristics and personal preferences, our speaker provided us with some Personal Development Opportunities. I used the opportunities outlined to mold myself, and learn what I needed to do to become a more balanced, and effective leader. Its 'opportunities' were similar to the challenges I had given myself prior to the assessment.

The book used for ELI was Kouzes and Posner's "The Leadership Challenge." This book talked about a vital part of being a leader; model the way. The year and a half prior to ELI I had been very involved in my sorority. I attended a lot of events, held offices, and did whatever was asked of me. However, I felt like my sorority was not going to be enough. We had many great leaders, and I thought that my role within the sorority would not be as significant as my role outside of the sorority. Through ELI I learned of many leadership opportunities around campus, and selected a few that would interest me. By taking part in several clubs and organizations outside of my sorority I modeled the way for young women who looked up to me; I hoped to show them that there is so much to do and care about in our community, outside of our sorority. Although I became involved outside of the sorority, I still held a very important role within it as well. I am the treasurer, which can often mean I have to make decisions and demand things from my sisters, that are not always positive, and usually don't get enthusiastic feedback. The section of the book entitled Encourage the Heart truly helped me develop my office into a more fun and meaningful aspect of my sorority. I did this by

using tips given in the book; rewarding people, giving sister's recognition, and by putting a humorous spin on having to pay dues and fines. I realize that my position will never be the most fun role, but members noticed the extra effort, and appreciated it, which I think encouraged their hearts to be more sympathetic to the office.

Several times over the course of the semester I have heard the saying, "leaders lead people from the inside out, not the outside in." This central lesson rang true throughout each of the conversations I had with my mentor group, in the lectures, in activities given by the guest speakers, and in our assigned readings. Leadership is truly about changing people, opposed to an organization or a mission statement. During a class at the beginning of the semester we discussed how to attain transitional leadership. Transitional leadership is when both parties involved in a transaction or collaboration are elevated and grow because of their efforts or the efforts of the other party. Leadership, opposed to other means of gaining support, possesses a deep underlying compassion for people and communities. Effective leaders we spoke about in our classes not only ran successful companies or had millions of followers, they were passionate, innovative, kind, and people oriented.

Relating to your followers or peers is vital in gaining respect for you and your vision. In one class session we were asked to rate the needs of blue collar employees from our perspective. My scale could not have been more wrong. I learned that all people value meaningful work, and positive relationships, even if they are not as educated or fortunate as me. From that class I realized how important it is to learn about people you are attempting to identify with (through work, organizations, or community) and eventually lead to a cause. In my role as treasurer in my sorority, this insight enabled

me to form bonds with people I normally would not have. These bonds encouraged positive attitudes towards me and the job I had to do as treasurer. I learned that although people were different than me, that by building relationships with them, we could better understand each other, and what WE needed to accomplish as a team.

A product of the challenges I made for myself, my classmates, my mentor group, guest speakers, and our instructors, is that I have developed into a more balanced leader. The Emerging Leader Institute not only gave the education I needed to lead knowledgably, but the inspiration I needed to lead passionately. At the beginning of the semester I was incredibly involved in many different organizations or committees that I was not enjoying any of them. Our class project, with the Bluegrass Autism Society, made me realize why I was on committees and getting involved in the community. The project was truly invigorating and refreshed my sense of community. The positive feeling I once felt when being involved in the community had dissipated over the semester, into contempt for extra responsibility and time. Our service project reminded me of the significance of people like me, who are willing to get involved and make a difference. Our service project truly brought passion back into my life, as a leader.

The Emerging Leader Institute is a rare opportunity to study something that is applicable to RIGHT NOW! I have gone through the semester putting new skills and lessons into action daily! ELI will equip anyone who is willing and open minded with the tools and hindsight to be an effective leader on the University of Kentucky's campus; and motivate you to get excited about a cause and channel your energy into an effort towards positive change!